

Human geography does count and in fact makes a real difference to a designer, especially in a world that calls itself 'global' but is unequivocally 'local' in many respects. Looking at Holland and Italy, the social, political and cultural landscapes found there seem to share few similarities and when it comes to the economy the gap between these two countries becomes even greater in terms of their respective resources, production modes and business models. Indeed, notable stories of design entrepreneurship do appear to confirm this but, surprisingly, they sometimes also highlight a like-minded approach.



1



2

'It all starts at school,' explains Edoardo Perri, co-founder of the Milanese brand Whomade, who attended the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam and taught at the Design Academy in Eindhoven. 'In the Dutch educational system the focus is on the designer who is encouraged to express his individual creativity in various forms. In Italy, where education is rather methodical and generalist, the project and not the person is brought to the foreground.' Gionata Gatto, a young designer who studied in Eindhoven

and currently runs a studio there called Atuppertu, shares this view: 'A crucial reason for my staying was that I had adopted some typical Dutch characteristics, such as the ability to approach projects with spontaneity and with a kind of boldness almost.'

'Dutch designers tend to oversee every aspect of their business without interference, from concept to manufacturing to distribution'

Maria Serra

This does not necessarily mean that Italians do not have a hands-on attitude or that they are afraid of 'putting their feet in the clay' as the well-known Dutch proverb goes; they simply seem to learn these skills outside school. 'I was born in a typical industrial area, which is a direct product of the pragmatic attitude of its inhabitants,' recounts Filippo Protasoni, who comes from the outskirts of Varese near Milan,

one of Italy's most productive 'industrial and craftsmanship districts'. 'As I see it, design has always been a creative solution to a very real and practical issue, or an answer to a question that has not actually been formulated yet but which calls for an exhaustive



reply anyway.' Italy's exceptional production infrastructure is a strong draw; indeed, many foreign designers have decided to relocate their business there for this very reason. 'Italians are lucky because, before they have even properly begun, they already have everything they need right under their

3



noses,' comments Anglo-Italian designer Sam Sanna, who moved to Milan immediately after his studies in London. 'While I was preparing my exhibition at the Salone Satellite for the first time, I outsourced the production of my prototypes, which I had up to then built myself, and it was at that point that I had my first encounter with the prolific Italian workshops. I was so impressed with them that they still make my collections to this day.'

At the same time, Italian designers also benefit from the presence of big brand names that, once a relationship is established, may commission their designs for large-scale projects. However, what would at first glance seem like a great opportunity sometimes actually turns out to be a limitation; indeed, some designers have seen their entrepreneurial aspirations frustrated. In the absence of adequate financial support, the

appeal of an apparent 'fast-track' to lucrative commissions essentially means that designers based in Italy rarely take the plunge and launch their own brand or, if they do, sadly, it will generally be a side activity to their main concern. Nevertheless, an increasing num-



5

ber of Italian designers seeking artistic autonomy are slowly adopting the kind of entrepreneurial approach displayed by their Dutch counterparts. The success of

recent fairs and events aimed at these people, such as Operae in Turin and Open Design Italia in Modena, in fact seems to confirm this. Antonio Cos, who has created his own 'Coslection', sees it as an essential form of creative survival, which allows designers to showcase their ideas and ways of working without compromise: 'It's quite hard to find an ideal partner in the industry. They are business-oriented people, while we as designers have more concept-oriented minds. Italian design masters have become such because, besides obviously being extremely talented and bold, they have found sensitive industrial partners who were not just interested in sales. Entrepreneurs of this kind could not survive in the highly competitive global market that exists today.'

'In the Dutch educational system the focus is on the designer who is encouraged to express his individual creativity in various forms. In Italy, where education is rather methodical and generalist, the project and not the person is brought to the foreground'

Edoardo Perri (Whomade)

Dodo Arslan, an Armenian-born designer with a studio in Milan says: 'My pieces would not meet the requirements of large-scale industrial production in terms of the choice of materials, the manufacturing process and cost. This is the reason why I have started to work with local craftsmen and, as a



6

THE DOTS

YEARBOOK

DUTCH DESIGN MILAN 2011



Pioneers in international business

Published by Tuttobene,
commissioned by Agency NL, Ministry of
Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation

Connecting the Dots showcases
all Dutch presentations at the
Milan Design Week 2011